

Forest Service Stream and Riparian Restoration Network: User Survey

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April 2018

SUMMARY

In March 2017, the Forest Service National Stream and Aquatic Ecology Center initiated an agency-wide community of practice: The Forest Service Stream and Riparian Restoration Network. This network was developed to connect field practitioners with each other, regional and national specialists, and researchers. Over the following year the community was expanded to more than 350 agency members from across the United States. To gauge the value of this effort to the agency's staff, and to plan next steps as the network moves into its second year, a survey was sent to all members. This report summarizes the results of this survey, to disseminate the collected information to members of this community of practice and to share key points with Forest Service leadership.

During the open survey period (February 22 to March 9, 2018) 122 responses were submitted. Key points from the survey results were:

- The **network is considered valuable** to both the Forest Service in general, as well as to individual participants.
- The network is **composed primarily of hydrologists and aquatic/fisheries biologists/ecologists**, though other fields are also represented, including riparian specialists, soil scientists, watershed and stream restoration specialists, and geologists. Forest Service engineers are poorly represented in the network.
- **A large majority (75%) of the network is populated by employees on National Forests**

and Grasslands. The remaining quarter of the network is composed of staff from the regions, the Washington Office, Research and Development, and State and Private Forestry.

- Respondents noted a wide range in stream and riparian restoration projects that they work on, with the **largest proportions categorized as general stream restoration, wet meadow and riparian restoration, fish/aquatic/riparian restoration, aquatic organism passage, and watershed restoration.**
- The top 4 key obstacles for performing stream and riparian restoration (with 1 being the most frequently reported, 2 the second most, etc.) are:
 - 1. Insufficient funding**
 - 2. Lack of capacity and expertise**
 - 3. Lack of leadership support**
 - 4. NEPA obstacles**

Specifically in regard to capacity and leadership support, **lack of time and resources** for stream and watershed restoration due to the demands of timber harvesting, fuels reductions, and other Forest needs were repeatedly noted by the respondents, with frequent **lack of support for restoration projects by leadership.**

- Most users have **not contributed to the network**, through either the email distribution list or the SharePoint.
- There is **very strong interest (97%) in attending virtual training opportunities (webinars)** hosted by the Stream and Riparian Restoration Network.
 - 27 respondents were interested in presenting a case study or training webinar
- There is **very strong interest (92%) in attending an in-person Forest Service national technical meeting on stream and riparian restoration.**
 - Most of the respondents (87%) thought their supervisor and line officers would support their attendance.
 - Fewer respondents (59%), but still a majority, thought their unit would have travel funds available for such a meeting.
 - 40 respondents were interested in presenting their work or expertise at an in-person national meeting.
- Many valuable thoughts were provided on how to improve the network. Key suggestions included webinars, regular postings, greater use of the SharePoint site, and an in-person technical meeting.



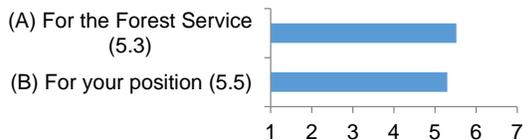
SURVEY RESULTS

Details of the survey results are presented, including background questions (Q1 - Q4), projects and obstacles for accomplishing projects (Q5 - Q6), contributions to the network (Q7 - Q8), training (Q9-Q18), and improvement (Q19). Obstacles to performing restorations were especially informative.

Background

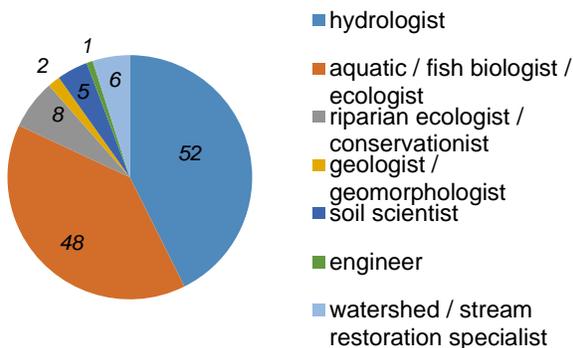
Q1: On a scale from 1 (not valuable) to 7 (extremely valuable), please rate the value of the Forest Service Stream and Riparian Restoration Network for the Forest Service in general (A), and for your specific position within the Forest Service (B).

R1: (122 answered)



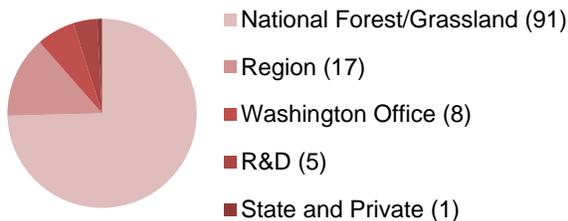
Q2: What is your expertise?

R2: (122 answered)



Q3: What type of Forest Service unit do you work for?

R3: (122 answered)



Q4: What specific unit do you work for?

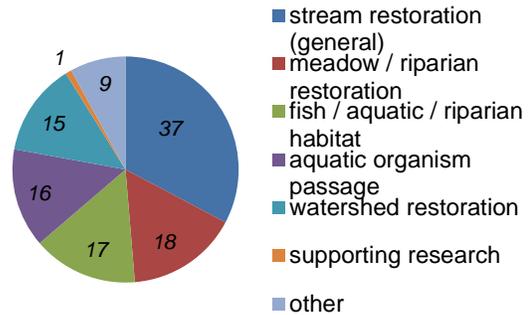
R4: (119 answered)

Projects and Obstacles

Q5: What type of stream and riparian restoration projects do you work on?

R5: (113 answered)

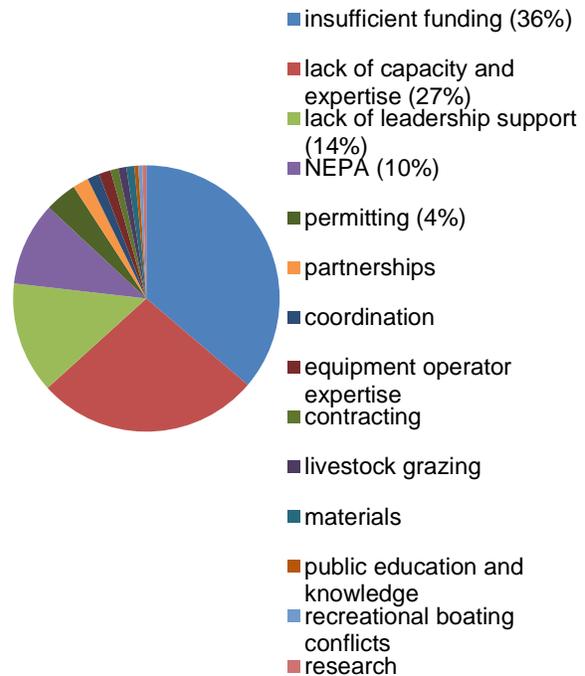
The answers were varied, and frequently the respondents listed multiple categories; for each response, the dominant restoration type was tallied.



Q6: What are your most substantial obstacles for accomplishing on-the-ground restoration?

R6: (112 answered)

Respondents typically listed a wide variety of obstacles for performing restorations. The responses were sorted into categories, with multiple answers noted by each respondent. The percentages are of the total obstacle count (207), rather than the respondent count.



There is a common theme in the responses that insufficient funding, lack of capacity and expertise, and lack of leadership support are key barriers to restoration implementation. Key frustrations were well communicated by a number of respondents. Provided below are representative quotes from three respondents:

“Recently my forest (like many others) has seen severe attrition with limited to no re-hires or lag times for hiring of over 1 year. This reduced staff capacity makes it extremely difficult to keep up with current high priority Forest workload - like major infrastructure projects (i.e. 2 gas pipelines), large timber sales and other heavy NEPA workloads. In addition, funding to support watershed improvement has been reduced steadily over the years to just a few thousand dollars spread across 7 districts - which means almost nothing substantial can be accomplished. And finally, new this fiscal year is NO hard targets for habitat improvement. As such, leadership does not support stream and riparian restoration as a priority. It is difficult to carve out time to dedicate to partnerships development and applying for grant funding to pursue on the ground restoration efforts, which has been the only way to accomplish even small stream rehab projects in recent years.”

“Getting support to do riparian restoration is extremely challenging because our priorities are timber and fuels. It's hard to get restoration projects on the POW to get the NEPA done. Everyone's plates are full so it's hard to fit in. NEPA needs to get done first so that we can apply for funding from implementation grants. It seems like there are a lot of grants out there for implementation but none/few for NEPA/planning. Working with partners is essential because many grants are only open to non-federal entities. It's hard to find the time to even plan projects, apply for grants and keep up with deadlines.”

“...We have partners and volunteers literally knocking on our door to assist with restoration projects, but we are tacitly denied internal funding on both the ----- and ----- NFs and the reason given is our program doesn't directly contribute to 'flagship targets' of timber volume sold or acres treated with prescribed fire. When we have received external grant funding, the ----- program has tried to strip what little funding we have in work plans that would cover archaeological, biological and botanical surveys necessary before we can implement restoration actions. We have repeatedly told them that grant funding cannot cover Forest Service employee salaries for these clearances. Our Forest

Supervisors have made it painfully clear that watershed restoration work is 'Not high priority' ”

(Note: Forest and program names deleted to protect the anonymity of the respondent.)

Contributions

Q7: *Have you contributed to the Forest Service Stream and Riparian Restoration Network?*

R7: (116 answered)

- Yes: 12%
- No: 88%

Q8: *Why have you not contributed to the Network? Are there any obstacles or barriers to you contributing?*

R8: (87 answered)

The most common answers were:

- Insufficient time
- Haven't come across anything deemed worthy to contribute
- Expertise too low to contribute to such a large group
- Unaware of the opportunity
- Learning from others, rather than personally contributing
- SharePoint not frequently contributed to
- Don't know anyone personally; valuable to have a face to face interactions first
- Assumed contributions were top down

Training

Q9: *Are you interested in attending virtual training opportunities (webinars) on topics related to stream and riparian restoration?*

R9: (113 answered)

- Yes: 97%
- No: 3%

Q10: *Are you interested in presenting a case study or training webinar to be hosted through the network?*

R10: (109 answered)

- Yes: 25%
- No: 75%





Q11: *What specific subject would you like to present on?*

R11: (25 answered)

A wide range of suggestions were provided, for both case studies as well as training in specific restoration approaches.

Q12: *What is your name, title, and contact information (for those who volunteered to present)?*

R12: (23 answered)

Q13: *Would you be interested in attending an in-person national Forest Service workshop on stream and riparian restoration?*

R13: (112 answered)

- Yes: 92%
- No: 8%

Q14: *Would your supervisor and line officer(s) support your attendance?*

R14: (112 answered)

- Yes: 87%
- No: 14%

Q15: *Would your unit have travel funds available for you to attend such a workshop in FY2019 that would likely be held in Fort Collins, Colorado?*

R15: (111 answered)

- Yes: 59%
- No: 41%

Q16: *Would you be interested in presenting a case study or other presentation at a national workshop?*

R16: (109 answered)

- Yes: 37%
- No: 63%

Q17: *What specific subject would you like to present on?*

R17: (40 answered)

A wide range of suggestions were provided; there appears to be good content available from the field for presenting at a workshop.

Q18: *What is your name, title, and contact information (for those who volunteered to present)?*

R18: (34 answered)

Improvement

Q19: *What specific actions would you recommend to increase the effectiveness of the Forest Service Stream and Riparian Restoration Network?*

R19: (75 answered)

A wide range of opinions were provided. These thoughts will be utilized as we move forward with developing this community of practice. The most common and thoughtful included:

- Increased Forest Service training and networking opportunities, through webinars and an in-person workshop
- Provide regular postings to the public distribution list (though reduced forwards of these emails to members of the network from regional and Forest staff)
- Greater utilization of the Sharepoint site (including templates for restoration techniques, contracts and drawings, training, case studies, monitoring information, etc.)
- Presentation of knowledge and tools developed in the field
- Weekly/monthly topics for online discussion
- Annual regional/Forest restoration workshops
- Greater sharing from across all levels of the network
- List of members' skills and experiences that practitioners can use to contact members about their specific problems
- Educate leadership on the importance of stream and riparian restoration
- Increased awareness of grant opportunities
- Facilitate partnership funding opportunities
- Increased interactions with other programs, including fire
- Greater outreach, to promote awareness of the network
- More support for the district level, including the availability of simple and helpful tools

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Survey review by David Levinson and Julian Scott was valuable and appreciated. David Levinson is also appreciated for his review of this report.

